

# GENESIS

## Chapter 12

### *The Call of Abram*

**Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.**

**12:1 Lord** – It was the Savior-God who spoke to Abram. (PBC)

*said.* God had spoken to Abram “while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran” (Ac 7:2). (CSB)

The way God dealt with Abram is typical of the way God deals with every sinner. It is important to note that if contact is to be established between God and the sinner, the initiative must start on God's end, not ours. He also deals with us, as He dealt with Abram, not in terms of demand but primarily in terms of promise. (PBC)

*that I will show you.* † Abram must leave the settled world of the post-Babel nations and begin a pilgrimage with God to a world of God's making (see 24:7). (CSB)

“Get thee out” (KJV), though entirely correct, sounds too sharply imperative in the English of our day; for *lekh-lekha* is a mild “go for thyself,” *lekha* being either a dative or merely an ethical dative, its force being like the English “do go. This command is attributed to Yahweh, whose mercy controls all that He does in this connection in singling out an individual who is to become the ancestor of the Savior's line. (Leupold)

Abraham and his family were to be separated from and separated to. Abraham was to “leave” and Abraham was to “go.” He was to be separated from the comforts and idolatry of both Ur and Haran. The moon-god was worshiped in both places. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

The Lord called Abram out of idolatry (Jsh. 24:2), in which he deserved nothing but condemnation and eternal death. This was not because Abram merited God's favor. Instead, God demonstrated His mercy and grace in calling an idolater, out of pagan surroundings and afflictions, setting him apart from the world of false belief to live by the promise of His grace.

By choosing Abram, an idolater, God demonstrated that it is not by works but by grace that we are saved. (TLSB)

*your father's house* – This indicates a larger complex of people who were part of the clan of Terah. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Abram heard God say those words twice in his lifetime. This first time it was in Ur, in southern Mesopotamia when he, together with his father's and brother's families left their homes. Following established trade route of the day, they moved north to Haran. It was in Haran that Abram heard God speak those words a second time. Humanly speaking, it must have been more difficult for Abram to obey them the second time. (PBC)

Haran still offered too many dangers to this man whom God's grace singled out, so also did "relatives," those who were tied to him by blood and were exerting a more subtle and powerful influence than the individual usually realizes. (Leupold)

*I will show you* – Though Abram did not know where he was going, he followed the direction provided by God provided by His Word. How the Word of God came to Abram is not specified, but Luther writes, "I am convinced that he was not called directly by God without the ministry" (AE 2:249). (TLSB)

**12:2–3** God's promise to Abram has a sevenfold structure. (CSB)

The covenant number seven prevails here, even though there is no explicit covenant involved. (Leupold)

(1) "I will make you into a great nation,"

*I will* – The covenant God makes with Abraham is completely one-sided. God give seven promises and asks nothing in return. Abraham is not chosen for any virtues of his own. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

*make you a great nation* – Abraham was seventy-five years old and did not have a son. Genesis 11:30 says that Sarah was barren. At this time she was sixty-five years old and seemingly past the childbearing age. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God's promise was given to a man who was resigned to being childless (11:30). Here, God promises that from Abram will come not only the people of Israel but also the Church of Christ, which encompasses baptized disciples of Jesus from all nations (Mt. 28:19). (TLSB)

At the time of his call Abram had the reputation of being a well-to-do cattleman. But that isn't the reputation Abram has on the pages of the Scriptures. He is a man with whom God shared some of His sacred secrets. He is called the friend of God; he is the father of believers; he is the father of the Israelite nation; he is an ancestor of the Messiah. (PBC)

The word for "nation" is *goy*, usually used of the heathen nations, but here, as in 35:11 and Exodus 19:6, in reference to Israel, to signify that, as nations go, Israel shall be great. "Great nation," of course, implies more than great numbers. Since the greatness is of God's making, it involves true greatness in every sense. If ever there was a great nation, it was Israel. The force of this word must naturally be reckoned over against the fact that at the time when it was spoken Abram had no son. (Leupold)

(2) “I will bless you,”

*I will bless you* – Only God can bless. Man can only wish and ask for God’s blessings on himself and others. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God blessed Adam and Eve, telling them to be fruitful and multiply (1:28). God blessed Abram indicating that his descendants would fill the earth and that all nations would be blessed through him. (TLSB)

Bless – Hebrew barak, “to bestow ability for success” (from the greater person to the lesser) or “to praise a person’s ability for success” (from the lesser person to the greater). Refers to bending the knees, perhaps to kneel and receive a pronouncement of inheritance with all its wealth (cf Gen. 27). “Bless the Lord” has the sense of “greet” and is common in the Psalms, expressing thanks and praise (34:1; 145:1, 10). In faith, praise is the greatest gift we can offer to our Lord. The blessing that came from the temple at Jerusalem now resonates through the Church, brought by pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other Christians who proclaim the Gospel of Christ’s sacrifice. (TLSB p. 842)

A man is blessed when due to the gracious working of God all goes well with him (cf. 39:5); the things that he undertakes thrive; and true success crowns all his endeavors. This certainly is a promise that was realized in Abram’s life. (Leupold)

(3) “I will make your name great,”

*make your name great* – The name equals the person. Abraham is called “the father of a multitude” (17:5); “the man in God’s confidence” (18:17-19); “a prophet” (20:7); “a prince of God” (23:6); God’s servant (Ps. 105:6) (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Even the heathen speak well of God’s people Israel (Deut. 4:6-7) because of God’s faithfulness in keeping His promise to them. St. Paul calls Christians the offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), indicating how widely God has extended the patriarch’s name on account of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Abram personally became famous. The various names that are given to Abram display a part of this fame. He is called “the father of a multitude” (17:5); a prince of God (23:6); the man in God’s confidence (18:17-19); a prophet (20:7); the servant of God (Ps. 105:6); and the friend of God (20:7). Even without such names he could still be famous. But this fame is not a personal achievement of his but a divinely wrought favor. (Leupold)

(4) “you will be a blessing,”

BE A BLESSING – The Hebrew form of the verb “be” is imperative (wehye). Abraham was not only to receive blessing but to become a blessing through the Spirit’s work in his heart. He had a moral responsibility to live such a life so that thereby others would be blessed by it. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Ultimately fulfilled in Christ, but also in various temporal ways, as when God blessed the Egyptians through Joseph, the Ninevites through Jonah, even the Babylonians during Israel’s exile (cf Dan. 2:48; 6:28. (TLSB)

This is something that God does: God is the One, who in the last analysis makes Abram to be a true blessing unto others. But at the same time, a moral responsibility of Abram's is involved: he should do his part that he may become a blessing to others. Consequently the imperative, "be thou a blessing." He personally should aim to live such a life that others are blessed by it. (Leupold)

(5) "I will bless those who bless you,"

Abram would experience opposition as, for the last century of his life, he lived a nomad in lands belonging to others. But God promised him he would be so closely identified with the work of God that to curse him, to despise him, would be tantamount to opposing God. (PBC)

For this difference between God's blessing and man's blessing are the wishing of good, God's blessings the impartation of good. Besides, it should be noted that divine grace presupposes that there will be many that wish Abram well; therefore mebharekhe'kha, plural, "thy blessers." (Leupold)

The Lord promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His people (Mt. 16:18). No effort on Satan's part would undermine God's promise to redeem the world in the promised Savior. Thus, Pharaoh's threat was drowned in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:28), kings Sihon and Og were destroyed (Deut. 2:33; 3:3), even world powers such as Babylon, Greece, and Rome suffered defeat., while God faithfully upheld His people and the promise of the Gospel. On the other hand, those who befriended His people, such as the midwives in Egypt (Ex. 1:20) and Rahab the harlot (Josh. 6:25), were blessed. (TLSB)

(6) "whoever curses you I will curse,"

The Hebrew uses two different verbs – 'arar for God's judicial cursing and galal for man's injudicious or blasphemous cursing. Again divine grace presupposes that there will not be many that wish this friend of God ill: Therefore meqallelkha, singular, "thy curser." The deeper reason behind all this is that Abram will be closely identified with the good work of God, that to curse him comes to be almost the equivalent of cursing God. (Leupold)

(7) "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God's original blessing on all mankind (1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring. In various ways and degrees, these promises were reaffirmed to Abram (v. 7; 15:5–21; 17:4–8; 18:18–19; 22:17–18), to Isaac (26:2–4), to Jacob (28:13–15; 35:11–12; 46:3) and to Moses (Ex 3:6–8; 6:2–8). The seventh promise is quoted in Ac 3:25 with reference to Peter's Jewish listeners (see Ac 3:12)—Abram's physical descendants—and in Gal 3:8 with reference to Paul's Gentile listeners—Abram's spiritual descendants. (Leupold)

Not merely a promise of temporal blessing, but the promise of the Gospel that in Christ Jesus – Abraham's Seed (Gal. 3:29) – people of all nations and times will have the eternal blessing of God's forgiveness. There is no greater blessing than that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). (TLSB)

The unfaithfulness of the Shemites could threaten once again to plunge the whole race into spiritual darkness, but the love of God took the initiative to guarantee that would not happen. God promised Abram that a great Descendant would be born to his family who would bring blessings to every member of the human race. The way Abram was saved is the same way sinners are saved today. God didn't have one way for people of the OT times to enter His family and a

different way for us of the NT period. There has always been only one way: to trust God's promises as these center in Jesus Christ. (PBC)

A blessing so great that its effect shall extend to "all the families of the earth" can be thought of only in connection with the promised Savior. This word, therefore, is definitely Messianic and determines that the Messiah is to emerge from the line of Abram. (Leupold)

**12:4** *Abram went as the LORD had told him.* See Heb 11:8. Prompt obedience grounded in faith characterized this patriarch throughout his life (see 17:23; 21:14; 22:3). (CSB)

Luther: "Promise and faith belong together" (AE 2:266). What God promised to Abram worked faith in him and caused him to act in faith. Cf. Rom. 10:17. (TLSB)

There are no complaints or hesitation, somewhat common among other called heroes of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

In His marvelous conversation with Abram, God had really said all that there was to say. All Abram could do was to speak the "Amen" to what God had promised. The Bible calls this "faith." Faith, then, is the hand which takes God's promises and makes them our own. By contrast, unbelief closes its hand into a fist and makes it impossible for God to give us His blessings. (PBC)

Hebrews 11:8 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

*and Lot.* See 13:1, 5. Lot at first was little more than Abram's ward. (CSB)

The pain of separation is eased in part by the coming along of Abram's nephew Lot. God's mercy is displayed in this fact, for He it was, not doubt, who disposed Lot's heart to desire to accompany Abram. (Leupold)

*seventy-five years old.* Although advanced in age at the time of his call, Abram would live for another full century (see 25:7; see also note on 5:5). (CSB)

He is even according to the standards of that time a middle-aged man (Leupold)

**12:5** *people they had acquired.* Wealthy people in that ancient world always had servants to help them with their flocks and herds (see 15:3; 24:2). Not all servants were slaves; many were voluntarily employed. (CSB)

Servants, laborers, and children and relatives of the same. Luther: "not simply his household but the true and holy church in which Abraham was the high priest" (AE 2:280). (TLSB)

*Land of Canaan* – From this Abram realized he would not be able to homestead this land; it was already occupied. Before his descendants could live here as their home, they would have to dispossess the Canaanites. This had to be a sobering realization for Abram. God was training Abram to believe what God had said, first of all, about the Promised Land. (PBC)

No one can fully realize the greatness of the things promised to the posterity of Abram until he remembers that the land promised to the posterity of Abram was already occupied by the Canaanites. But Abram's faith is not daunted by this seeming difficulty. (Leupold)

**12:6** *oak tree of Moreh*. See perhaps 35:4; Jdg 9:6, 37. A famous sanctuary was located at Shechem in central Canaan, and a large tree was often a conspicuous feature at such holy places. But Abram worshiped the Lord there, not the local deity. (CSB)

Once in Canaan, Abraham had an opportunity for idolatry. The tree mentioned here signals the usual tree or grove of trees accompanying a site of idol worship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

*Canaanites were in the land* – Moses reminds us that God’s people, though called to be separate, are still in the world, surrounded by enemies against which the Lord protects His elect (John 15:18-19; 17:11-21). (TLSB)

**12:7** *The LORD appeared.*† The Lord frequently appeared visibly to Abram and to others. (CSB)

No one can see God and still live (Ex. 33:20), and “no one has ever seen God” (1 John 4:12; cf 1 Tim 6:16). Novatian: “It was not the Father who was seen...but the Son who has both been accustomed to descend, and to be seen because He has descended. For He is the image of the invisible God” (ANF 5:628; cf Col. 1:15). (TLSB)

Here God appears to renew his promise of offspring and land. Where Abraham might have worshiped an idol he instead builds his first of several altars at significant places of blessings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

At this critical moment for Abram, the Lord, the Savior-God, appeared to him, to reaffirm and clarify his promise and to bolster Abram’s faith. He made it clear that Abram was not to try to take immediate possession of the land. It was only for Abram’s descendants that the land of Canaan would become a new homeland. Each new promise of God nourished and exercised Abram’s faith. (PBC)

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

*to your offspring I will give this land* – For the development of God’s purposes in the seed of Abram it is essential that a definite land be available within which this seed comes to its normal development. So the promise of the land as held in safekeeping by God for Abram’s sees it not a capricious promise but one that ties up definitely with the needs of the case. From this point on it will be seen that every new promise fits into the development of God’s purposes as into an organic whole which is going through a normal process of growth. (Leupold)

*an altar*. The first of several that Abram built at places where he had memorable spiritual experiences (see v. 8; 13:18; 22:9). He acknowledged that the land of Canaan belonged to the Lord in a special way (see Ex 20:24; Jos 22:19). (CSB)

Abram established an altar there because the Lord appeared to him. Abram does this throughout his life. (TLSB)

Now look at Abram’s response to the Lord’s appearance. In a land full of Canaanites and Canaanite religion, he built an altar to the Lord, the true God, the God who had appeared to him and restated His promise. To the heathen Canaanites, as well as to the men and women of his

own household, Abram's worship announced: "I don't know whom you're going to worship, but I want you to know that the only God deserving of your worship is the God who has appeared to me with all His grace and His favor. (PBC)

A word from God requires a response on the part of man. Abram felt himself impelled to give personal public testimony to God's mercy displayed in this appearance. (Leupold)

**12:8 Bethel.** Just north of Jerusalem, it was an important town in the religious history of God's ancient people (see, e.g., 28:10–22; 35:1–8; 1Ki 12:26–29). Only Jerusalem is mentioned more often in the OT. (CSB)

Remember that Moses originally wrote the book of Genesis for the ancient people of Israel, who at the time had not yet entered the land. Can you imagine how mentioning the names of cities which they would one day inhabit would awaken anticipation for their new home? Each of the historic spots Abram visited and where he worships would have special meaning for his descendants when they one day occupied the homeland God had picked out for them. (PBC)

*Ai* – This is common noun meaning "heap of stones." (Leupold)

*called on the name of the Lord* – This is a public invocation of Yahweh's name, an act which could hardly be performed without proclaiming the works and the character of Yahweh – a fact which leads Luther to translate: "he preached concerning the name of the Lord." This expression specifically means "to use the name of the Lord in worship." (Leupold)

"(Prayer) includes the entire ministry" (AE 2:287. Hebrew allows the translation "H proclaimed in the name of the Lord." Luther proposed that Abram may have learned of the Lord more fully through the ministry established by the patriarch Shem. (TLSB)

**12:9 journeyed on** – Nasa' actually means "to pull up stakes," a natural expression in nomadic days. To convey the idea that this kept on for quite a while the absolute infinitive (nasoa') is joined to the finite verb, as well as the absolute infinitive of the verb "to go" (halokh) which almost equals our adverb "continually." (Leupold)

*Negev.* The dry wasteland stretching southward from Beersheba. The same Hebrew word is translated "south" in 13:14. (CSB)

This lies south of Hebron. It is an arid region in parts of which isolated flocks may be tended, at least down as far south as Beersheba. It may have been less desiccated in patriarchal day. (Leupold)

**12:1–9** God calls an idolater to faith, giving him a promise that God Himself would fulfill for all people. God's Spirit works faith, when and where He pleases, through the Word. He is faithful to do as He has said. He made Abram into a great nation, blessing all the world through the Son. As Abram's offspring by faith, we have the blessing of God's forgiveness and life without end. • Heavenly Father, call us to trust the Word of God in the water of Holy Baptism, to cling to everything You command, and to live by the blessing of Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)

*Abram and Sarai in Egypt*

**10** Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. **11** When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, **12** and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. **13** Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” **14** When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. **15** And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. **16** And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. **17** But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. **18** So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? **19** Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” **20** And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

**12:10** *famine* – The Lord disciplines His children by way of crosses and troubles (Heb. 12:6). Here, a famine forced Abram to leave the Promised Land in search of food. A painting in the tomb of Khnumhotep II (c 1870 BC) depicts 37 people for the East (Canaan), who visited Egypt. In c 1944 BC, a shepherd rescued an Egyptian named Sinuhe who had fled into Canaan. Such accounts illustrate early interaction between people of Egypt and Canaan near the time of Abraham. (TLSB)

*went down to Egypt ... because the famine was severe.* Egypt's food supply was usually plentiful because the Nile's water supply was normally dependable. (CSB)

**12:11** *beautiful.* See v. 14. She was 65 at the time (see v. 4; 17:17). The Genesis Apocryphon (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) praises Sarai's beauty. Abram's experience in this episode foreshadows Israel's later experience in Egypt, as the author of Genesis, writing after the exodus, was very much aware. Abram was truly the “father” of Israel. (CSB)

Though Sarai was more than 65 years old at the time (12:4; 17:17), her beauty was still both notable and desirable. The aging of people described in Genesis does not seem to correspond directly with aging as we experience it today. (TLSB)

**12:13** *Say you are my sister.* If Pharaoh were to add Sarai to his harem while knowing that she was Abram's wife, he would have to kill Abram first. (CSB)

A half-truth, as the two were, in fact, related (26:7). Abram sought to preserve his own life, even at the risk of his wife's chastity. Augustine: “Now he did not deny that she was his wife, but held his peace about it, committing to God defense of his wife's chastity” (NPNF2 1:322). (TLSB)

**12:15** *Pharaoh.* Egyptian royal title meaning “the great house.” Originally, it was applied to the king's palace, but was later applied to rulers of Egypt. (TLSB)

*taken into Pharaoh's palace* – Into the palace of the king, where he took Sarai as one of his wives (v. 19). (TLSB)

**12:16** *dwelt well with Abram* – The Lord blessed Abram with worldly wealth, keeping His promise to make Abram’s name great, to bless those who bless him, and to curse those who curse him. (TLSB)

*sheep, oxen, donkeys* – Livestock was an important measure of wealth in ancient times (see 13:2). (CSB)

*camels*. Although camels were not widely used until much later (see, e.g., Jdg 6:5), archaeology has confirmed their occasional domestication as early as the patriarchal period. (CSB)

Evidence for the early domestication of camels had been scant, but is now confirmed. (TLSB)

**12:17** *Lord afflicted* – Affliction was sufficient to make the king aware of God’s displeasure. How Pharaoh realized his circumstances were due to taking someone’s else wife is not clear. (TLSB)

*plagues* – Not like those God would later bring on Egypt through Moses (Ex. 11:1), but severe enough to trouble the king’s conscience. (TLSB)

**12:19** *Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’... ?* Egyptian ethics emphasized the importance of absolute truthfulness, and Abram was put in the uncomfortable position of being exposed as a liar. (CSB)

Text may imply that Abram had little choice over the matter, though Pharaoh assigns him blame. When a king claimed a woman, family members often had little recourse. (TLSB)

**12:10–20** Although God promises Abram that he will possess the land that God will give him, Abram still finds no secure place in which to dwell. At times, we also find ourselves in circumstances that show the opposite of what God says. In Abram’s case, he went forth—even out of the land of promise—trusting that God would fulfill His Word. God returned Abram and Sarai, in time, to Canaan, and there kept all that He had promised to them. In the fullness of time, He even brought forth the Son by whom all nations would be blessed. Though the hour of Jesus’ agony and death was dark, God was keeping His promise. • Lord God, when all we see appears to contradict what You have promised, teach us to rely on Your unfailing Word. Defend us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)